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HERMENEUTICAL CARTOGRAPHY: A MODEST PROPOSAL

Edward Hobbs

WELLESLEY COLLEGE

EDITOR: Julian Boyd

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# GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION

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For twenty years the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture has served scholarly interest and brought distinction and visibility to the Graduate Theological Union. As fourth President of the GTU, I am sure I speak for the whole community, faculty, students, and staff, in offering congratulations and thanks for this record of achievement.

The unique cooperative dialogue between the University of California at Berkeley and GTU scholars has resulted in an impressive record of publications in the realm of hermeneutics. This organization has brought together nearly 200 diverse academicians to share in dialogue worthy of the distinction they have achieved. Scholars in hermeneutical studies around the world have been well-served with the 59 Colloquy publications. As a fundamental responsibility, the Center has provided timely research and publications which have come to be highly regarded throughout the academic community, providing valuable insights into the relationship of meaning to texts.

The vision of the GTU includes that of becoming a center for ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue, culture, and study. The Center for Hermeneutical Studies has fulfilled a vital part of that vision over the years. We applaud you for your many accomplishments.

As the parent institution, we join in your 20th Anniversary celebration and welcome with appreciation the 59th Colloquy. We look to the Center in continuing its service to students and scholars both locally and around the world.

Robert M. Barr  
President

## PARTICIPATION IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE CENTER FOR HERMENEUTICAL STUDIES

During the past twenty years, 98 faculty members from 20 departments at the University of California in Berkeley, and 79 faculty members from the Graduate Theological Union have participated in the activities of the Center. We especially wish to thank the following for their contributions to the work of the Center:

### SERVICE ON THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- UCB FACULTY: Paul Alexander, William Anderson, Julian Boyd, Gerard Caspary, John Coolidge, John Dillon, Erich Gruen, James Jarrett, Steven Knapp, Daniel Melia, Charles Murgia, Thomas Rosenmeyer, and Wayne Shumaker.
- GTU FACULTY: Michael Aune, Mary Ann Donovan, James Duke, Victor Gold, William Herzog, Edward Hobbs, Rebecca Lyman, Mary Lyons, Massey Shepherd, Herman Waetjen, David Winston, and Wilhelm Wuellner.

### AUTHORS OF COLLOQUY PAPERS

- UCB FACULTY: Bernard Bokser, William Bouwsma, John Coolidge, Peter Damon, John Dillon, Alan Dundes, Steven Knapp, Anthony Long, Thomas Rosenmeyer, John Searle, Hans Sluga.
- GTU FACULTY: David Biale, Massey Shepherd, David Steward, David Winston.

### AUTHORS OF RESPONSES

- UCB FACULTY: Paul Alpers, William Anderson, Robert Bellah, Michael Bernstein, Julian Boyd, Gerard Caspary, John Coons, Margaret Coote, Peter Damon, John Dillon, Hubert Dreyfus, Robert Holub, Alan Dundes, Michael Griffith, Erich Gruen, Steven Knapp, Ira Lapidus, Anthony Long, Daniel Melia, Jacob Milgrom, Charles Murgia, Michael Nagler, John Noonan, Thomas Rosenmeyer.
- GTU FACULTY: Doug Adams, Charles Bartow, John Coleman, William Countryman, John Dillenberger, Jane Dillenberger, Mary Ann Donovan, Anitra Kolenkow, Thomas Leahy, Mary Lyons, James McClendon, Donn Morgan, Kenan Osborne, Ted Peters, Stephen Reid, David Stagaman, David Steward, Herman Waetjen, Claude Welch, David Winston, Antoinette Wire, Wilhelm Wuellner.

153 Faculty members from other institutions have participated in the activities of the Center by attending the Colloquies, by writing the principal paper for 37 vols., and by writing 102 of the responses. These faculty members represent 87 Institutions: 57 in the USA (24 in the East, 19 in Mid-West and 14 in the West - 8 of these in Bay Area), 16 in Europe, 5 in England, 6 in Canada, and 3 in Australia.



## LIST OF COLLOQUIES PUBLISHED SINCE 1969

- |    |      |                                |  |
|----|------|--------------------------------|--|
| 1  | 1970 | Van Unnik, Willem              | First Century AD Literary Culture and Early Christian Literature                     |
| 2  | 1970 | Betz, Hans Dieter              | Paul's Apology, 2 Corinthians 10-13 and the Socratic Tradition                       |
| 3  | 1972 | Robinson, James M.             | Jewish Gnostic Nag Hammadi Texts   |
| 4  | 1973 | Georgi, Dieter                 | The Records of Jesus in the Light of Ancient Accounts of Revered Men                 |
| 5  | 1973 | MacRae, George                 | The Thunder: Perfect Mind (Nag Hammadi Codex IV, Tractate 2)                         |
| 6  | 1973 | Smith, Morton                  | The Aretalogy Used by Mark   |
| 7  | 1973 | Williams, Gordon               | Virgil's Fourth Eclogue  |
| 8  | 1973 | Coolidge, John                 | The Pauline Basis of the Concept of Scriptural Form in Irenaeus                      |
| 9  | 1974 | Damon, Phillip                 | The Cults of the Epic Heroes and the Evidence of Epic Poetry                         |
| 10 | 1974 | Dihle, Albrecht                | Greek and Christian Concepts of Justice  |
| 11 | 1974 | Alonso-Schoekel, Luis          | Narrative Structure in the Book of Ruth  |
| 12 | 1974 | Kee, Howard C.                 | Aretalogies, Hellenistic "Lives," and the Sources of Mark                            |
| 13 | 1975 | Wallis, Richard                | The Idea of Conscience in Philo of Alexandria  |
| 14 | 1975 | Brown, Peter R. L.             | A Social Context to the Religious Crisis of the Third Century AD                     |
| 15 | 1975 | Conley, Thomas                 | "General Education" in Philo of Alexandria   |
| 16 | 1975 | Dillon, John M.                | The Transcendence of God in Philo: Some Possible Sources                             |
| 17 | 1975 | Ricoeur, Paul                  | Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics: Ideology, Utopia, and Faith |
| 18 | 1975 | Fuller, Reginald               | Longer Mark: Forgery, Interpolation, or Old Tradition?                               |
| 19 | 1976 | Kilpatrick, Reginald           | Literary Fashions and the Transmission of Texts in the Greco-Roman World             |
| 20 | 1976 | Winston, David                 | Freedom and Determinism in Philo of Alexandria                                       |
| 21 | 1976 | Badian, Ernst                  | The Deification of Alexander the great   |
| 22 | 1976 | Kustas, George                 | Diatribes in Ancient Rhetorical Theory   |
| 23 | 1976 | Rist, John M.                  | The Use of Stoic Terminology in Philo's <u>Quod Deus Immutabilis Sit</u> 33-50       |
| 24 | 1976 | Dixon, John W.                 | Art as a Hermeneutic of Narrative  |
| 25 | 1976 | Dundes, Alan                   | The Hero Pattern and the Life of Jesus   |
| 26 | 1977 | Betz, Hans Dieter              | Paul's Concept of freedom in the Context of Hellenistic Discussions of Human Freedom |
| 27 | 1977 | Ricoeur, Paul                  | Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation  |
| 28 | 1977 | Burkert, Walter                | Orphism and Bacchic Mysteries: New Evidence and Old Problems of Interpretation       |
| 29 | 1977 | Pearson, Birger                | Philo and the Gnostics on Man and Salvation  |
| 30 | 1977 | Bokser, Baruch                 | Philo's Description of Jewish Practices  |
| 31 | 1977 | Shepherd, et al.               | The Commentary Hermeneutically Considered  |
| 32 | 1978 | Kilpatrick, George             | A Textus Receptus Redivivus?   |
| 33 | 1978 | Mortley, Raoul                 | The Problem of Knowledge in Late Antiquity   |
| 34 | 1978 | Brown, Peter R. L.             | The Philosopher and Society in Late Antiquity  |
| 35 | 1979 | Chadwick, Henry                | The Role of the Christian Bishop in Ancient Society                                  |
| 36 | 1979 | Long, Anthony A.               | Soul and Body in Stoicism  |
| 37 | 1980 | Meyer, Ben F.                  | Self-Definition in Early Christianity  |
| 38 | 1980 | Iser, Wolfgang                 | Spenser's Arcadia: The Interrelation of Fiction and History                          |
| 39 | 1980 | Wilson, Barrie A.              | Interpretation, Meta-Interpretation, and Oedipus Tyrannus                            |
| 40 | 1980 | Gabba, Emilio                  | Greek Knowledge of Jews up to Hecataeus of Abdera                                    |
| 41 | 1981 | Kannengiesser, Charles         | Holy Scripture and Hellenistic Hermeneutics in Alexandrian Christology: Arian Crisis |
| 42 | 1982 | Grant, Robert M.               | The Problem of Miraculous Feedings in the Greco-Roman World                          |
| 43 | 1982 | Clausen, Wendell               | A Commentary on Virgil's First Eclogue   |
| 44 | 1982 | Searle, John R.                | Meaning  |
| 45 | 1983 | Jauss, Hans Robert             | The Dialogical and Dialectical Neveu de Rameau                                       |
| 46 | 1983 | Brown, Peter R. L.             | Augustine and Sexuality  |
| 47 | 1983 | Conley, Thomas                 | Philon Rhetor: A Study in Rhetoric and Exegesis                                      |
| 48 | 1984 | Malina, Bruce                  | The Gospel of John in Sociolinguistic Perspective                                    |
| 49 | 1984 | Judge, Edwin A.                | On Judging the Merits of Augustus  |
| 50 | 1984 | Kustas, George                 | Before Discourse   |
| 51 | 1985 | Rosenmeyer, Thomas             | Deina Ta Polla   |
| 52 | 1985 | Knapp, Steven                  | Against Theory 2: Sentence Meaning, Hermeneutics                                     |
| 53 | 1986 | Schuessler Fiorenza, Elizabeth | Theological Criteria and Historical Reconstruction: Martha and Mary, Luke 10:38-42   |
| 54 | 1986 | Bouwma, William                | Calvinism as <u>Theologia Rhetorica</u>  |
| 55 | 1987 | Gelzer, Thomas                 | How to Express Emotions of the Soul, and Operations of the Mind                      |
| 56 | 1987 | Fikentscher, Wolfgang          | Modes of Thought in Law and Justice  |
| 57 | 1988 | Steward, David                 | Teaching and Learning Practice: A Relational Hermeneutic                             |
| 58 | 1988 | Kannengiesser, Charles         | A Conflict of Christian Hermeneutics in Roman Africa                                 |



## IN APPRECIATION

The twentieth anniversary of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies provides a welcome opportunity to express appreciation for the work of the Center. During much of its first decade it was my fortune to be a doctoral student at the Graduate Theological Union and frequent participant in the Center's colloquies - attending most of them from the fifth through the thirty-sixth. For the past decade I have continued to value the Center from a distance through receiving the protocols of the colloquies. And I especially valued the Center's activities during a return to the GTU as Visiting Scholar for the Fall 1989 Semester.

One of the ways I have gained perspective on the Center during the 1970s is from Sharon Boucher's M.A. thesis written on the hermeneutics of the first 39 colloquies ("Interpreting the Interpreters: A Hermeneutical Study of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies" GTU, 1981). Boucher captures well the focus of the Center's colloquies on interpretive issues, centering around how interpreters establish the relationship of meaning to texts. Among the many recurring questions are these: How does the "world of the text" relate to the world of the interpreter, both that of the first readers and the modern scholar? Is there necessarily a "primary" meaning that can be arrived at for any given text, i.e., is it possible to establish a single relationship between the world of the text and a historical world? What is the relationship among the multiple readings of a text that are evident in the history of interpretation of that text, i.e., what is the appropriate role of the "history of the text" in the on-going hermeneutical quest? Can there be meaningful dialogue between readings of a text as typical and as unique, or more strongly, where is the locus of the difference between reading a text as confirming its world and as confronting its world? Does this potency reside primarily in texts, in authors, in interpreters, or in historical contexts? Each set of answers to these questions has implications for how ancient texts are used as sources or as resources for reconstructing earlier sources.

As a biblical scholar, hermeneutic questions continually confront me from many directions. The years of participating in the Center's colloquies as a graduate student provided valuable insights into the multiple dimensions of texts. Equally important was the interdisciplinary context of the colloquies, always including both GTU faculty and those from several University of California departments, interacting often with a "world class" hermeneut, in friendly dialogue appropriately preserved in the Protocol Series now in its twentieth year.

Numerous individuals have contributed in many ways to this admirable history. Among those who invested much of themselves in nurturing the success of the Center, surely none exceeded the efforts of Edward Hobbs, co-founder of the Center with Wilhelm Wuellner. It is thus most fitting that this fifty-ninth colloquy, marking the twentieth anniversary of the Center, have Professor Hobbs as its featured guest.

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## HERMENEUTICAL CARTOGRAPHY: A MODEST PROPOSAL.

Edward Hobbs

When the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture was initiated twenty years ago, the words of its title were carefully chosen to indicate the chief concerns of its founders. The importance of Hellenistic culture has been observed during most of its life, with the relationship or significance of that culture for modern culture less often noted. But it is at the level of Hermeneutical Studies that our record has been more spotty.

Rarely, the Center has focussed Colloquies on hermeneutics quite sharply, such as the 31st on the Commentary, and sometimes a bit less directly, such as the 17th and 27th (both with Paul Ricoeur) and at times almost unwillingly, when a hermeneutics alien to some participants, was employed in the position paper, such as the 38th with Wolfgang Iser, or the 39th on Oedipus with its claim for the single or univocal meaning of any text. Most of the time, however, the matter of hermeneutics has been outside of the range of the papers, although participants nonetheless dragged it in frequently.

It is to this often bypassed issue of hermeneutics that I wish to address myself on the occasion of the Center's beginning its third decade. I do not intend to argue for the true or correct hermeneutics, but rather against the notion of a single right hermeneutics, precious though such a notion once was to me. The text which I will use for examples is the one in which I am a specialist: the Jewish and Christian Bible(s).

Like many other documents, but far more than most, the Bible has been interpreted in a variety of modes, in terms of many different understandings of "interpretation." Some would even prefer to say that it's been "subjected to" such a variety of modes of interpretation, implying that most of them have been less than beneficial in their effects. It is not the fact that there have been many differing, disagreeing, or contradictory interpretations of the meaning of a text to which I refer. Rather, it is the diversity of notions of what it means to say what a text means - in other words, a diversity of hermeneutics or of hermeneutical theories.

The problem was already recognized by the ancients, classical, Jewish, and Christian. Rabbinic interpreters engaged in a great variety of methods, not to mention the Stoic-style methodology of Philo of Alexandria. The Rabbinic methodologies were, in fact, more diverse than those utilized by Christians, though by the medieval period they were largely summarized under four headings, conveniently remembered by the acronym PaRDeS, (literally "orchard!"), anglicized neatly into PaRaDiSe, standing for:

- (1) Peshat ("plain meaning," i.e., the literal meaning),
- (2) Remez ("hint," "wink," "sign," the allegorical meaning),
- (3) Derash, ("search," "inquiry," the homiletical or figurative meaning),  
and
- (4) Sod, ("mystery" or "hidden secret," the mystical meaning).



Early Christian exegesis tended to move in two directions.

The more typical was an allegorical method already present in the New Testament. For example, Paul (in Gal. 4:22-26) takes Ishmael and Isaac to have allegorical meaning (allegoroumena), referring to Judaism and Christianity. Not quite the same, but related, is the technique of saying that God was not really concerned with dumb animals, and thus the law against muzzling an ox is intended to guarantee a decent wage for the preacher (1 Cor. 9:9f). Still further from allegory, but within the same general realm, was the adducing of models (typoi) from the Greek Bible for the persons and events of the New Age. Adam, for example, is a model for Jesus, though the fulfillment differs in decisive ways from the model (cf. Romans 5:14; 1 Cor. 15:21-22, 45-50).

This method came to remarkable fruition in the second and third centuries, above all in the city of Alexandria. Clement represents it well at an early date, and Origen carries the method to its pinnacle, or nadir, or whatever. It is not that they failed to recognize that some items in the Bible have a literal sense; it's that such texts seemed to them to require little in the way of interpretation compared, to the "thousands of other passages in the Gospels" which contain uncertainties and oddities and the like (so Origen). The passages must be a code for something other than their face value, and the allegorical method was just the tool to discern that code.

The other direction in which early Christian exegesis moved was represented above all in the city of Antioch, where an influential Jewish community had powerful impact on Christian interpreters. In this school, the literal meaning of the text was the true one Diodorus of Tarsus, following the Antiochenes, wrote What Is the Difference Between Theory and Allegory, arguing that "theory," the true meaning, was antithetical to allegory. "Theory," was to be found only in the literal or historical meaning of the text. Diodorus' work was carried forward by one of his students, and the greatest interpreter of the school, Theodore of Mopsuestia. He wrote Concerning Allegory and History: Against Origen, whose subject-matter is self-evident. In many ways, Theodore was an historical critic a millennium and a half early; his works were thus rightly condemned to the flames by the Second Council of Constantinople in 553! Another of Diodorus' students was John Chrysostom, archbishop of Constantinople, who utilized the literal method throughout his career. His work had more effect than Theodore's in the long run, for some reason escaping condemnation, and exercising a major influence even on the great Thomas Aquinas.

Now, from the late patristic era onward through the medieval period, there was a recognition that no one method of interpretation could cope with the materials of Scripture. Consequently, several methods were affirmed, with all usually being necessary for every passage. How many methods? The number varied, running as high as seven. Typical, however, was four, which appeared as early as Augustine and which obviously is analogous, probably even related, to the Jewish fourfold method. There was a little jingle or a bit of doggerel that summed it up for the simple:

Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,  
Morales quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.



(The literal teaches what happened; the allegorical what to believe;  
The moral what to do; the anagogical where you are headed.)

Thus, any text might be properly interpreted as having an historical meaning, a theological meaning, an ethical meaning, and an eschatological meaning.

While this may seem a bit far-fetched, it filled a great need. The various modes of interpretation often resulted in interpretations which had no points of contact between them. The creation of this typology allowed a reader to grasp a relationship between what seemed to be utterly disparate readings of a text. The diverse readings could be held together as being necessary in order to exhaust the meaning of the text for us. Four modes of interpretation, four different hermeneutics, were necessary to expose the full significance of a Scriptural text. Thus the problem of diversity in hermeneutics was solved; but even more: the diversity was not only no longer a problem, but rather became a virtue, an intellectual touchstone to spare readers from missing key aspects of the text.

Between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, this hermeneutical typology was broken down. At least it was broken down in the scholarly world; the Church(es) went her/their own way(s), responding with either an authoritative interpretation or the interpretation of every believer guided by the Holy Spirit. The scholarly world gradually settled on the historical-critical method, which in turn produced a new sort of meaning of meaning, a new hermeneutical touchstone. This new meaning of meaning, what it means to say what something means, may be roughly characterized as "what it meant when it was written." When the question arose, "Meant to whom?", the usual answer (though often unexpressed) was, "What it meant to its author," or, to put it in psychological terms, "What the author intended to say." Through the 19th and early 20th centuries, whether in cruder or in more precise terms, this viewpoint dominated Biblical, as well as most other scholarship.

Shortly after World War I, some aspects of the Church's concerns with the New Testament text were re-introduced into the scholarly discussion by a pastor outside the New Testament scholarly world, who published a commentary on Romans. Karl Barth's *Roemerbrief* underwent a radical re-writing three years later, and caught the attention of a number of leading New Testament scholars, almost all of whom denounced it for its failure to play the historical-critical game. Rudolph Bultmann's review of the second edition, however, brought the book into the center of discussion, thus outraging many and baffling others, including Barth himself who was as confused by Bultmann's appreciation of his book as he was by Schlatter's repudiation.

However the dialectical theology be assessed, it remains one curious outcome that by 1950 it was once more respectable to ask, "What does the text mean to people today?", popularized into the distinction, "What it meant/what it means" - that is, historical-critical scholarship was distinguished from, but related to, the concern of the ordinary reader who wanted to know, "What can this text say to ME?" The triumph of this popular distinction was shown in the publication of *The Interpreter's Bible*, which offered both "Exegesis" and "Exposition" of the text, in more or less equal amounts. "Exegesis" meant the historical-critical interpretation, while "Exposition" meant the meaning of the text for Christians of today.

The distinction between "what it meant" and "what it means" was widely



attacked, both by historical critics and by advocates of some sort of de-mythologizing; but it was defended, to the surprise of many, by Krister Stendahl, who argued that the meaning and significance of the text for people today may not at all be the same as its meaning for its authors or its first readers, and to collapse the two is an error fatal for scholarship. The problem, of course, is how to develop any controls for determining the present meaning.

The issue, however, is much deeper than this distinction. For a long time, the historical-critical method seemed to hold the field in determining "what it meant," i.e., the peshat, the literal meaning. But in recent decades, the situation has dramatically altered.

Especially since World War II, there's been a significant interest on the part of New Testament scholarship in the trends or fashions in other fields, particularly in literary criticism, so that "structuralist" interpretations and "semiotic" interpretations of text have been followed by "deconstructionist" interpretations, etc. The usual procedure has been to describe in brief one or two prior interpretations which are misguided or erroneous or done with inadequate tools, followed by a primer on the new, superior method, and then to present the author's interpretation of the text, or a sample thereof.

Much work, however, including the bulk of that done by established scholars, is not of this type. Rather, it resembles the mainstream scholarship done prior to World War II. Some of it is, to use terms loosely, "historicist," using (for example) the Gospels as tools to reconstruct history, whether of Jesus or of the early church or of developing Christian theology; and some of it is "rationalist," or "intentionalist," studying texts in order to reconstruct the intentions of their authors.

A number of other kinds of interpretations are also in use, to which we'll refer in a moment.

The diversity of these interpretations is bewildering to many in Biblical scholarship and largely ignored by many others; the tendency is to engage in discussion only with those interpretations which fall into a pattern familiar or congenial to the individual scholar, and to dismiss as irrelevant or even perverse those falling into other patterns.

This diversity, I'm persuaded, stems from diverse understandings of what constitutes interpretation or exegesis, that is, of hermeneutics, which frequently are unconsciously held. In the case of my own specialty, this diversity includes examples of at least the following:

- (1) historicist hermeneutics (the historical-critical movement),
- (2) existentialist hermeneutics (e.g. Rudolf Bultmann),
- (3) ontological or philosophical hermeneutics, (e.g. Hans-Georg Gadamer),
- (4) rationalist or intentionalist hermeneutics (e.g. E. D. Hirsch),
- (5) formalist or structuralist hermeneutics (e.g. Roland Barthes),
- (6) deconstructionist hermeneutics (e.g. Jacques Derrida),



- (7) critical or psycho-social hermeneutics (e.g. Jurgen Habermas),
- (8) phenomenological hermeneutics (e.g. Paul Ricoeur),
- (9) reader-oriented hermeneutics (e.g. Wolfgang Iser),
- (10) political hermeneutics (e.g. Ched Myers), and
- (11) feminist hermeneutics (e.g. Elizabeth Schuessler-Fioorenza, Phyllis Tribble).

To these might be added:

- (12) Marxist hermeneutics (e.g. Norman Gottwald), unless it be included under political hermeneutics.

What does this enormous diversity signify? Perhaps it signifies chaos. For some, chaos is delightful; but for most, it spells an impossible situation. At the least, it signifies a diversity of hermeneutics which makes dialogue and scholarly interchange excessively difficult across the boundaries of hermeneutical beginning-points.

Is there any way out of this chaos, or forward from this diversity of interpretation? Happily, there is. (Indeed, you would have been astounded if we reached this point and I said there is not.

As a beginning, it is crucial that interpreters recognize that instead of right and wrong methods, there may be virtues in many, perhaps even most, of these approaches. Something may be revealed by one which is invisible when using other methods.

Further, we have observed that the creation of typologies in earlier times had the advantage of showing the place of each hermeneutical goal or method in a larger whole which purported to exhibit the fuller meaning of the text, a fullness not attainable by any one method.

Finally, if the relationship between one hermeneutics and another were known, advance even within one approach might be improved; and joint attacks on a single text might be mounted, with results beyond the sum of the individual approaches.

My own device for coping with diversity in hermeneutics without, on the one hand, adopting a position that views all meaning as something inserted into the text or imposed upon the text, and on the other hand without a benignly indulgent toleration of all hermeneutics other than my own - that is, my own way of conceptualizing a genuinely pluralist hermeneutics - is to utilize the model of language offered by Noam Chomsky's transformational generative linguistics. I view great texts as something like deep structures, which generate a variety of surface structures, each of which in its own way exhibits the meaning in the deep structure. Chomsky's Extended Standard Theory allows for the surface structure to play a role in meaning; just so, each hermeneutics offers particular dimensions of meaning in the interpretation of texts. A given hermeneutics is something like a given transformation or cluster of transformations, in my model. How dull and almost lifeless our language would be if we had only a single transformational pattern to produce sentences from

the deep structures! The preceding sentence would have been impossible, for instance.

What then is needed? What program do I propose? Four steps must be taken in my "modest proposal" - steps in Biblical studies, at least, to keep it modest; or in Hellenistic Studies, were the proposal to become somewhat immodest; or in the study of all texts, were this to be turned into a "Grand Proposal." The first of these is the sine qua non of the entire proposal; the others flow from it.

(1) Recognition of the value (even if not the validity) of a genuinely pluralist hermeneutics.

This step is so crucial, but also so ambiguous, that I take the liberty of quoting from a proponent of such a pluralist hermeneutics, one of its best theorists as well as its best practitioners, Wayne Booth of Chicago:

Many critics call themselves pluralists these days; as a label, pluralism is almost as fashionable in criticism (where it often stands for a belief in a plurality of valid meanings of a text) as in politics (where it has become a synonym for "open" or "tolerant," as in the term "pluralistic society,") or in theology (where it is a synonym for ecumenicism)... We are probing instead the possibility of a full embrace of more than one critical method without reducing pluralities to one (a supreme monism), or multiplying them to a vague or meaningless infinity, or cancelling them out into zero (Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism, Chicago, 1979, p.25).

He proceeds carefully to distinguish this pluralism from various relativisms with which it might be confused. Although no one will remember it, in a paper on Biblical Pluralism which I was invited to present to the Pacific Coast Theological Society many years ago, I made a similar effort to restrict the term "pluralism" by distinguishing it sharply from toleration on the one side (the toleration of positions divergent from one's own), and from "indifferentism," on the other (a position indifferent to the truth or validity of conflicting positions). I enter those definitions by title, as well as Booth's careful analysis of the problem of a plurality of modes of interpretation.

(2) Self-conscious recognition, by authors of new work, of the hermeneutics utilized in that work.

This step alone might engender some degree of humility about the significance of one's own achievements; more importantly, it would help everyone to perceive the relationship between this new work and the body of previous work in the field.

(3) Analysis of the hermeneutics underlying each significant piece of work done in recent decades, whether explicit or implicit.

What a wonderful use for Ph.D. dissertations! The task is so enormous that we need all the help we can get; perhaps instead of ten more dissertations on



the correct reading of a scrap of text found in an ancient latrine, we could have our students do something really helpful to everyone.

(4) Creation of a new typology to interrelate the various approaches.

OR, since that is probably far too much to expect,

(4) Creation of hermeneutical maps of interpretations of texts, locating various approaches in relation to each other.

Is this step possible? I thought a few years ago I could do it myself. An acute attack of reality has convinced me otherwise.

What I had thought to reserve for myself was, obviously, the first alternative, that is, creating the typology. This in itself would require such a degree of creativity that, were I to achieve it, I could then retire thereafter in a blaze of glory. Failing that (and such a fantasy will fail!), I propose that this is a task for a number of scholars, sub-dividing the labors of the second alternative. On the other hand, perhaps I am too cautious. Perhaps there is an interpreters' Einstein or Chomsky standing even now in our midst, unrecognized, but soon to offer us that new typology, that hermeneutical cartography for which the world has been longing. Perhaps.

Response by Marvin Brown, University of San Francisco

Although this paper gives us much to think about, I would like to take the liberty to ask for more by posing four questions.

### I.

The first question is, "What ever happened to the 19th century quest for a universal hermeneutic?"

Remember that provocative line by Schleiermacher: "Language is the only presupposition of hermeneutics, and everything that is to be found, including the other objective and subjective presuppositions, must be discovered in language."

I suspect that your work with transformational grammar might signal that you agree with Schleiermacher, at least on the function of language in interpretation. Does that mean that hermeneutical pluralism has a common base, that is to say, that pluralism really represents different presuppositions about language; or, as I think Edward Hobbs would say, about languaging? So that's the first question: Is languaging the hermeneutical subject?

### II.

The second question I have concerns the identification of hermeneutical diversity. You have listed different hermeneutical approaches, but they have been abstracted from their particular context. I know that to move toward a general hermeneutic requires the rejection of particular hermeneutics, hermeneutics of law, of Scripture and the classics. But I wonder if we can ignore the context, the hermeneutical situation, without losing a significant aspect of what these differences really entail. Feminist hermeneutics, for example, rose out of the particular world of paternalism and oppression and strives to change that world. I suspect that theorizing about hermeneutical theories without regard for their historical and social context distorts the hermeneutical circle.

So my second question is, "How should we consider the context, or the different contexts, of these different hermeneutical approaches?"

### III.

And my third question is related to the second. The practice of hermeneutics - and in a sense studying hermeneutics is also a practice - but this practice not only occurs in a historical and social context, but also, to use Josiah Royce's phrase, "in communities of interpretation." The Center for Hermeneutical Studies has provided such a community for 20 years now, and its founders and supporters deserve our gratitude. We could identify a wide variety of interpretive communities, the communities of family, church, law, business, and so on. But the community close to many of us is probably the educational community, or perhaps even a subcommunity of teachers and scholars, or perhaps an even smaller hermeneutical community. And by "hermeneutical community" I mean those of us who share with one another the endeavor to think



about interpretation.

So my third question is, "What has been the effect of hermeneutical pluralism upon the hermeneutical community?"

#### IV.

For a moment, I would like to give another interpretation of the hermeneutical community, namely that we are a community - we are really a service organization with clients. We are our own clients as teachers and writers, but we also serve others as we provide resources for their work in interpretation. For many of us, our clients are students and future scholars. I wonder how well we are serving our clients and how we can use the current hermeneutical pluralism to serve them better.

Now, this brings me to the fourth and final question: "What's the controversy? What's the urgent need that demands our attention?" I suppose our answer depends upon our interpretation of what's happening to the hermeneutical community and upon our understanding of our clients' needs. Regarding the hermeneutical community, Hobbs suggests pluralism has disrupted its dialogue and scholarly interchange. So we can take Hobbs's proposal as addressing this problem. But what about our clients? What's their urgent need that demands our attention? Can a hermeneutical typology also meet their needs? That was the fourth question.

If we take Hobbs's proposal as an answer to a question or as an answer to several questions, we need to understand the questions before we can comprehend his answers. This paper by Hobbs gives us some knowledge of what those questions were, and maybe some of my questions can further that.

Response by Mary Ann Donovan, Professor of Historical Theology,  
Jesuit School of Theology, Berkeley

Reflecting on the hermeneutical chaos described by Prof. Hobbs, led me to recall my first trips to Berkeley. The first was set up while I, living then in Cincinnati, was enduring the record-breaking cold of January, 1977. Who could refuse an invitation to interview in sunny California, Berkeley then being in the second year of its own record-breaking sunshine (not to mention drought)? What was the Berkeley I saw on that first trip? The Berkeley represented by the Jesuit School of Theology and the Graduate Theological Union. The Berkeley of the University of California libraries. The Berkeley inhabited by professors and students. My guides then are now my colleagues.

I returned in July to set up my apartment. It was a different Berkeley I visited. I searched out the Co-op, the hardware store, the carpet center. I found Payless and Cost-Plus. My guides? My neighbors, friendly clerks, the ads in the Chronicle and in the Tribune.

After a trip to Toronto to defend my thesis, September meant coming to Berkeley to live. Living here, I continue to discover new Berkeleys, new faces of California, using new guides as new needs and interests surface.

A general and basic understanding of Berkeley geographically, politically, and educationally preceded any movement in this direction. From that point I have employed many guides in my explorations of Berkeley and of California, the choice depending on a combination of need and opportunity. Lack of clarity in choice and use of an appropriate guide could serve only to make life more difficult.

This extended example is, I think, directly pertinent to the problem that Prof. Hobbs studies and suggests my own position. I need to know something about the thing studied, the text, before posing any further questions. I thus give a priority to the historical-critical method. But movement beyond the application of that method is an almost invariable necessity if one is not to be locked into a sterile historicism. Where one turns depends on the problems posed by the text and on my own knowledge of available alternative hermeneutical methods.

In examining the foundational documents of religious orders of women, I find myself studying works as disparate as the Rule of St. Augustine, the Dialogue of Catherine of Siena, the Conferences of Vincent de Paul. There is a quadruple intersection I often find myself searching out: that between Holy Scripture, the ancient inspirational Rule or other document, the more recent legislative documents, and the direction for choices to be made by contemporary women who base their lives on those documents. In every case, the historical interpretation of the works in question is foundational.

A functional interpretation may follow. This is the approach used by Carolyn Walker Bynum in her recent work, Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women. This approach was helpful, for example, when I attempted to relate Catherine's Dialogue to a problem posed in the chapter documents of a congregation of Dominican sisters. A social hermeneutic might be valuable, as it was in relating the Conferences of Vincent de Paul to the Constitutions of a congregation of Sisters of Charity. It can also be appropriate to apply several methods to the reading of one text, as for



example in interpreting the writings of Irenaeus.

I hope I have made it clear that I agree completely that the use of a wide variety of methods, separately or collectively, is valid. However, I have questions about the usefulness of a map of the maps. In terms of the specific project and steps outlined in Prof. Hobbs's paper, I agree: (1) there is a positive value to plurality in hermeneutics; (2) it is extremely helpful to be clear about which hermeneutic one is employing in a given piece of work; (3) it would be useful to analyze the hermeneutics underlying significant pieces of work done in recent decades.

I question whether it would be particularly helpful to create a new typology of the interrelationship of the various hermeneutic methods, or even to develop hermeneutical maps to relate the various approaches to each other.

I'm not so interested in the theoretical aspects of the relationship of one theory to another theory as in the practical aspects of the appropriate use of various methods. If theory, in this case would support and aid practice, fine. If not, then I would rather participate in a seminar like the one Hobbs led at Harvard in 1983 than read a theoretical study... and I suspect most of our students would gain more from such a seminar than from the theory. What I am suggesting that is needed in this situation in hermeneutics is some kind of atlas or guide to the types of tools that are available, some kind of extended reflection on major varieties of methodology of a kind that I don't find in the current handbooks.

Response by Claude Welch, Dean Emeritus  
Graduate Theological Union

I found it difficult to imagine why Edward has suggested that I might be one of the respondents to this paper, apart from the fact that I have an opportunity to welcome him back to Berkeley. Or apart from the fact that he knows that I don't know anything about hermeneutics and am therefore not really competent to offer a substantive critique of this paper. (He's halfway admitted that to me.) The occasion also gives me an opportunity to note that there is at least one person who still remembers that paper on pluralism at the Pacific Coast Theological Society.

This is a very attractive paper and proposal. There are a couple of queries that I think might be interesting to raise along with the others that have been raised. One, in the realm of theology or, at least hermeneutics as it is practiced or relevant to theology, is whether there is any significant relation between religious commitment, or the understanding of faith, and an appropriate hermeneutical method. I rather suspect that this was the case of the Reformation period, in the insistence of the reformers on the historical meaning and the abandonment of the multiplicity of the medieval meanings.

I think something of the same sort is involved in the debate in the 1890's and following over the historische and the geschichtlich, between a Kaehler and a Harnack, or between a Loisy and a Blondel. I'm sure there are powerful elements there of the understanding of faith. And the same thing would be true with respect to Karl Barth's abandonment or whatever he did with the historical-critical method. And certainly also with Bultmann's proposal for de-mythologizing. And it would interest me to have Hobbs comment on how that would affect - if this is the case - how that would affect the kind of pluralism that he thinks maybe is appropriate and to be welcomed.

Which leads to the second kind of question. I'm not clear - I'm a pluralist, I like pluralism (everybody likes pluralism) and probably in the sense in which I think he means it. And I'm not capable of trying, myself, to relate these dozen different hermeneutical methods that he identifies. But is the premise of the proposal that there might turn out to be some hierarchy among these various kinds of hermeneutics, with the idea that in that way one could identify, if not the best among them, at least primary and subsidiary varieties which may or may not illuminate each other? Or is there the real possibility that there are fundamental incompatibilities here? If I remember Hobbs's paper at the Pacific Coast Theological Society, it was the latter point that he wanted to make: that real pluralism allows for fundamental incompatibilities.

If that is the case - and I think that's true - then what would be the end product of a mapping out of these various hermeneutics? What does one want to do, other than in some cases to recognize some fundamental conflicts?



MINUTES OF THE COLLOQUY OF 23 APRIL 1989

The Participants

Professors at the Graduate Theological Union:

Michael Aune (Pacific Lutherna Theological Seminary)  
John Donahue (Jesuit School of Theology)  
Mary Ann Donovan (Jesuit School of Theology)  
Dan Fraikin (Visiting Scholar)  
Thomas Leahy (Jesuit School of Theology)  
Lewis Mudge (San Francisco Theological Seminary)  
Claude Welch (Dean Emeritus)  
Antoinette Wire (San Francisco Theological Seminary)  
Wilhelm Wuellner (Pacific School of Religion)

Professors at the University of California:

Julian Boyd (English)  
James Jarrett (Education)  
Steven Knapp (English)

Guests:

Edward Hobbs (Wellesley College)  
Marvin Brown (University of San Francisco)  
Anitra Kolenkow  
Fred Veltman  
Wellington Wilson

## MINUTES OF THE COLLOQUY OF 23 APRIL 1989

## The Discussion

Julian Boyd: Welcome to the Twentieth Anniversary Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies. As the Director of the Center for 1989-90, I would like to introduce the co-founders of the Center and ask them to say a few words before we begin the Discussion.

Wilhelm Wuellner, who is Professor of New Testament at the Pacific School of Religion, has actually worked with the Center longer than Edward Hobbs since Edward left us to go to Wellesley College some time ago. Wilhelm, would you please offer us some reflections on the Center?

Wilhelm Wuellner: Let me be as brief as my memory will allow. Twenty years ago, we were very excited and busy. We had the blessing of the administration of the Graduate Theological Union, and its moral and financial support, to launch the Center for Hermeneutical Studies which, at the time, was essentially GTU-based and oriented. The scope of the Center as then conceived, as launched in early May 1969 with an official meeting, included the projection of several different sub-groups and interests ranging from computer-assisted research in the humanities to what we now call cross-cultural studies (with a focus on studies in Asian cultures), and sociological studies applied to literary hermeneutics.

By the late 1960s, we felt that the first half dozen years of cooperation among GTU schools, since its inception in the early 1960s, had reached a point where we were comfortable enough with each other in the GTU consortium that we could now face the next phase: cooperation with the faculty of the University of California in Berkeley. But how that was to be done was not clear at first. We initiated a series of meetings with various UC Berkeley departments. I recall one other feature that might be of interest. The director of the newly founded Claremont Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, Professor James M. Robinson, was invited to give the opening address. This was done with the hope of possible cooperation and of developing working relations between the Center and the Institute. We had Professor H. D. Betz from Claremont up here twice and Professor Robinson once more. This cooperation did not flourish to the extent we had envisioned.

In fact, many things did change in the course of two decades. At the current juncture there is the need for new self-definition and some new direction for the Center. I'm eagerly looking forward to the results of creative minds at work, and the editorial committee of the Center, under the leadership of Professor Julian Boyd, to give the Center's program a new shape. May there be another twenty years!

Julian Boyd: Thank you, Wilhelm. Now I would like to introduce Edward Hobbs who introduced me to the Center for which I have always been grateful. Along with Wilhelm, Edward has always been the Center for me, and I am very happy that he is back with us today for this colloquy.

Edward Hobbs: It's an honor to be brought all the way across the country for the Twentieth Anniversary of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies. My memories of the very beginning I won't trouble you with, except for two comments. One was those early grand plans - what we were talking about was that we were going



to have a lot of money. That's the point at which all of those grand plans foundered. Of the many different kinds of things the Center for Hermeneutical Studies was going to do, only one was to have these colloquies. But the colloquies are all that survived, probably because it was possible to do them without much money. John Dillenberger, and later Claude Welch, gave us a modest sum from the GTU funds and we managed to survive by selling the protocols of the colloquies. With the sales of the protocols, some of them in large numbers, we did get a little bank account. And everyone worked without pay including Sharon Boucher whom we should thank for three or four years' work mailing, typing, and everything.

In connection with the founding of this Center, I want to mention a person who was very important to us: Dieter Georgi. He was here really only for the very earliest of our colloquies. Nevertheless, the Center really came into being because of him. It was because we were afraid that Dieter would accept Harvard's offer that we responded to his desire to have something analogous to the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity that Jim Robinson had begun in Claremont. Dieter felt very strongly that if something like that were here, it would be worth his staying. Thus the work that the rest of us did in trying to bring the Center into being was initially to keep Dieter happy and to ensure that he didn't leave. But he left in any case and we were stuck with the Center.

Julian Boyd: Thank you, Edward. Now to begin the Discussion, do you have any comments on the responses?

Edward Hobbs: I am delighted with all three of these responses. I might add that the most important reason I was concerned to have Claude Welch as a respondent is an article or very extended review he published perhaps fifteen or twenty years ago on Schubert Ogden's work. Claude attacked the di-polar notion, obviously stemming from his mentor, Charles Hartshorne. I was impressed by the fact that Claude wrote, "This presupposes, in effect, a flat map. Suppose in fact we're dealing with something like the earth, a globe?" As I remember the article, Claude said, "Shift the model a little bit; move from two-dimensional to three dimensional and you're not going to be able to do what Ogden does." I thought Ogden was caught in a way he couldn't have imagined having been caught, because of his imagery. I thought Claude would do something analogous; and I'm afraid (or glad) that he did so at the end of his comments.

Let me start with Claude's response. On your first point, I'm quite sure that there is a relation between religious commitment and hermeneutics; that as a new understanding of faith or some fundamental shift takes place religiously, the old hermeneutics often has to yield to something else. I suspect that what in fact the rabbis were doing (by "the rabbis" I mean basically the 2nd to 8th centuries, in the composition of the Talmud and Mishna) in developing their own theory of four-fold meaning was this: That they were confronted by a mass of material about which the rabbis before them had said, "Well, the text means this; no, the text means that; but Rabbi X said this," and later, "But Rabbi Q said this and Rabbi Z said the other thing." They were trying to make sense of their own history of interpretation. And, unlike Christians, who gathered councils together to beat the hell out of the people who were in the minority, and then said that the majority had the true hermeneutics, rabbis just left all the material there. But they had to make sense of it somehow. They realized



some rabbis were asking a different kind of question than others were. I suspect that lies behind the four-fold interpretation.

The fact that Christians didn't really see the necessity for all that in the first three or four centuries, that they only saw two meanings, I think is symptomatic. But as soon as Christianity was religio licita, everything shifted. They could now come out in the open, and so they changed the way they did hermeneutics. Your Reformation example, and the Historie-Geschichte argument, the dialectical methodology, demythologizing, all demand some shift in hermeneutics.

What I'm first of all pleading for is the notion that we don't have to exterminate or even denigrate the kind of work that was done before us or that was done by our predecessors; we can recognize that some methods may not be very valuable for our situation, and others much more valuable. So far that's only to argue for tolerance. But I really wanted to go beyond that.

Claude's second point: that my proposal might involve a hierarchy among hermeneutics so that there's a best one, presses me to say, "No." For the first half of my scholarly career I believed that there was a hierarchy, that there was a "best" hermeneutics. I welcomed those helpers out there who showed me what was best. But I've migrated away from that. I'm convinced now that there is not a hierarchy. I said "map"; you said "atlas," which is better than map. But I would prefer "atlantography," if the word exists. (The plural of atlas would be atlantes, wouldn't it?) "Atlantography" is not commonly used. Your model, of a three-dimensional, global model, is much more accurate. I welcome both of these as corrections and expansions of what I was concerned with.

It is not clear to me that the human race is ever going to evolve to the point where we see things the way God presumably sees things, if that has any meaning; or to see the one ultimate truth behind all other truth. But until that comes about, there will be fundamental incompatibilities. Because of that, I think that the function of a map or an atlas or a new globe, might be just to make them clearer. It's better to be clear about those things than to be arguing about whether they exist.

As I recall the old argument between waves and photons for the theory of light did not result in "wavicles." So while we wait for a unified field theory, which may never come, we ought to recognize these fundamental incompatibilities. There is no super-hermeneutics.

Moving to Mary Ann: you did better than I could with your introduction on Berkeley. For different purposes, different hermeneutics are very valuable. As you point out, the structuralists are helping you understand what the Against Heresies is, or whether it's a unified work, and so on. On the other hand, when one reads some scholars in structuralism, One finds many of them saying, "No. The true meaning of the text is what we have just displayed. We have done a structural analysis of this text or that text, and here is the correct interpretation." I don't mean that there's usually that much arrogance initially; but what happens with most kinds of interpretations is that battles start. People from alternate positions - not a different conclusion out of one position, but in another position - end up in turf wars. The point you've made is also the one I'm after: "Yes, for certain purposes, certain hermeneutics are needed." You do give a priority to the Peshat. I'm a biblical scholar; how could I be anything other than a believer that the Peshat is number one? But I've tried to deny it to you, Claude. My social situation is that I was raised as a biblical scholar, I learned their methods, and we have been doing that for so long that it's Gospel Truth! But I would argue that the Peshat does not



have that priority. The way you and I work, however, is as trained historians; so naturally the Peshat comes first in our work.

Where you came out for a functional approach, i.e., when one does certain kinds of work, one uses what's needed; that's a different model than I used. I was using a map, a territory model; you're using a tool model. I think there's much to be said for that. If I want to make something, a physical object, I may need a saw. But then I'm going to need a plane, and then sandpaper, and a hammer, or a drill. Wittgenstein tried to teach us this: that language is a box of tools that you use for various purposes. So I liked that also.

Finally, you liked my first and second proposals. On the third one, you said you liked the idea of having helpful atlases. I accept that! On the fourth proposal: my first version is unified field theory. When I was 40, I thought I was capable of it. But in terms of my second version of the fourth proposal, you said no, you would much rather see an atlas of texts rather than of theories. That's what I thought I said. Let me read it exactly: "creation of hermeneutical maps of interpretations of texts," not "maps of theories of interpretation." "The creation of hermeneutical maps of interpretations of texts locating various approaches in relation to each other." A lot of energy is wasted in hermeneutics by arguing just one theory against another, rather than in fact seeing what one kind of hermeneutics does relative to what another kind does and so on. I really meant to be saying what you say you want.

Marvin's questions are really big ones. His first is, "What ever happened to the 19th century quest for a universal hermeneutic?" And then he reformulates it. But let me answer it in that form first.

I would say, I think the same thing that happened to the search for a universal grammar. The 19th century grammarians thought they had a handle on this. The Junggrammatiker, were most forcefully aiming in this direction of a really universal grammar. But the study of American Indian languages at the start of the 20th century began the collapse. And when structuralist linguistics came out on two different fronts, in Europe and America, suddenly in effect they pronounced, "There's no such thing as universal grammar." But the quest has returned, in a sense. Chomsky has opened up the possibility of a universal grammar again. But it doesn't look the same as it did before. In the 19th century they really thought there would be a grammar in the sense that we had used grammar earlier. What's emerged now is a grammar that underlies deep structures, not surface structures; surface structure grammars really do appear to be incompatible with each other. But a theory is available that makes it possible to speak again in recent decades about universal grammar, whereas under the impact of structuralist linguistics it looked as though that were impossible. If we can do in hermeneutics what's been done in language and in linguistics, it may be that we could move toward a new search. The other form of your first question, "Is languaging the hermeneutical subject?": ultimately, yes. But I suspect we're going to have to look at language differently than we have. And again we're awaiting the new Chomsky or something of that sort.

Your second question, the identification of hermeneutical diversity, is, "How should we consider the context of these different hermeneutical approaches, the social context?" I simply acknowledge that is terribly important. It is related to Claude's faith-community issue. Of course that is important. Just as asking a certain question may require different hermeneutics, so being in a certain community and trying to speak to your own community might require a different approach to hermeneutics. I agree that's



crucial.

To the third question, "What has been the effect of hermeneutical pluralism upon the 'hermeneutical community'?", my answer would be, "Stimulus." Sometimes it has been warfare, but it's also been stimulus.

And you say you want to interpret our community as a service organization with clients. I like that! People in hermeneutics really are very much like service organizations, and our clients are students and scholars, and you're wondering how well we serve them, how we could use the current hermeneutical pluralism to serve them better. The contention of my paper is that currently we don't really have hermeneutical pluralism; what we really have is hermeneutical diversity. But I'm longing for hermeneutical pluralism!

And your fourth and final question: "What's the urgent issue that demands our attention?" You say of me, "Regarding the hermeneutical community, you suggest that pluralism has disrupted its dialogue and scholarly interchange." No, I'm not suggesting a recent interruption; I'm saying that there was what looks to us like a medieval consensus. The interruption has been since the Middle Ages. "What is the urgent need of our clients that demands our attention?" Well, obviously to the students, for example, there is no urgent need. We have to convince them there is a need. Those of us who worry about these questions must help people see that there's a problem there, and then, having made them feel this need, try to begin meeting the need. Neither students in general nor scholars in general feel this as a need. Our task is to be a gadfly.

Steven Knapp: I want to say, first of all, that I appreciate the generosity of your proposal, Prof. Hobbes. I have a question that I think is related to Claude Welch's question about incompatibility, though it's from a slightly different perspective and perhaps reflects a slightly greater degree of skepticism toward pluralism. I wonder whether what we're dealing with in the hermeneutical diversity you described is really a variety of tools, rather than substantive differences of belief. And I ask this question in part thinking of some of the examples that you gave when you were listing the series of hermeneutical approaches. The first one on your list, I believe, was historicist hermeneutics. And somewhat further down the list you mentioned feminist hermeneutics. I just picked those up as two, I think, convenient examples.

Recently, a session of the Center focused on work by Elizabeth Schüssler-Fioorenza, now at Harvard Divinity School. In that particular protocol she spoke, as she has elsewhere, of a hermeneutic of suspicion, which she thinks ought to be directed against the texts of the New Testament. Of course, she didn't invent that term; she picked it up.

Edward Hobbs: From Paul Ricoeur.

Steven Knapp: From Ricoeur, yes. And the way she uses that term leads me to wonder to what extent it should be conceived of as a method at all rather than as a particular kind of historical belief, in fact, a particular historical belief about a range of ancient texts. I'm struck by the fact that methodologically she seems perfectly content with historicist techniques. In fact, she endorses, I think pretty much wholesale, traditional form critical approaches and so on. She's not interested in changing the methods that are applied to biblical texts so much as in suggesting that, because these texts



are, as she calls them, androcentric, they have a different content from the one that previous scholars have seen in those texts.

And indeed one can use form-critical approaches and other kinds of approaches, and apply them to the New Testament, keeping in mind one's belief that there is a crucial historical fact about the authors of those texts, namely that they were expressing an androcentric bias. And then, given that disagreement with earlier scholars, everything else in her account that seems to distinguish her account from those of her teachers, would seem to follow from this fundamental difference of belief. That suggests that the incompatibility is perhaps not so much to be seen - or at least the incompatibility that mostly divides the interpretive communities that we deal with, ought not to be located - in methodological terms so much as in substantive, ideological terms. I just wonder how that kind of disagreement can be dealt with by the sort of scheme that you're proposing.

Edward Hobbs: My list was intended simply to indicate a great variety of stances people have taken. They're not meant to be on a par with each other.

Steven Knapp: Of course.

Edward Hobbs: For example, I mentioned political hermeneutics, which was number 10; 12 was Marxist hermeneutics, which may or may not be a form of political hermeneutics, but I mentioned Norman Gottwald because he first developed this material while he was here at the GTU; it is a Marxist approach, particularly as to the occupation of Canaan. He certainly was engaged in historicist hermeneutics. I didn't mean in any sense that these are incompatible, nor that they're all on a par with each other, nor that they have walls between them. Rather, the list is to say that what in fact happens is a lack of dialogue by and large between practitioners of these various methods. A number of them lean on historicist hermeneutics. On the other hand, among biblical scholars, at least, there are many who simply say, "We do historicist hermeneutics - that's it, period. And you do with it as you wish." Others may say - Elizabeth, for example - "Oh no, Helmut. You looked at that text, but you're a man and you're blind to something that I can see because I'm a woman. And if I asked that question as a woman, I'd say, 'Wait a minute. This is a patriarchal kind of text and we ought to get that out in the open.'" My list is not meant to be a typology. It is a list, a laundry list, nothing else. Of course, there are some hermeneutics that I think are mutually exclusive.

Wilhelm Wuellner: Name two.

Edward Hobbs: I would say to hear Jacques Derrida deal with a historical-critical interpretation of a text is a perfectly good example. I must say, trying to deal with Derrida I've found very difficult, even more, to deal with Derrida's followers in this country. There may be between certain kinds of communities such alien approaches to interpretation that they will in fact end up being incompatible.

Steven Knapp: Actually, the point of my question was not to wonder whether they were ultimately compatible so much as the question of whether their differences were primarily methodological. What I was suggesting in those examples is that it didn't look like a methodological incompatibility so much as an ideological



incompatibility. And so my general question is, what's the relation between methodological compatibility or incompatibility on the one hand, and ideological compatibility or incompatibility on the other hand?

Wilhelm Wuellner: I sense, Steven, that the reason we haven't got the dialogue lamented by Edward is that the ideological incompatibility is felt so strongly, which makes some people feel that there's no point in engaging in dialogue.

Edward Hobbs: But it may be that I'll help get at one of your concerns by saying that you said "not methodological but ideological," and you assumed that when I talk about hermeneutics I'm talking about methodology. I'm not. I meant to be talking about hermeneutics, an understanding of what it means to say what something means. And I only gave these as examples of a diversity of what constitutes interpretation or exegesis. Most of them aren't self-contained hermeneutics; they are ways of practicing interpretation that presuppose some kind of hermeneutics which I want to examine.

Steven Knapp: Well, in light of what you said, I think I can rephrase my question. Let's grant that the term "hermeneutics" can imply both ideological and methodological differences, so that it would be reductive to say that hermeneutical disagreements are simply disagreements over method: they can sometimes be disagreements over ideology as well. I'd simply ask, in that case, "Doesn't the fact that sometimes methods can coincide but ideologies can differ, whereas alternatively sometimes the ideologies can coincide but the methods can differ, doesn't that kind of diversity add a wrinkle of complexity to the kind of diversity we're confronting, which may make one a little less sanguine about the pluralistic model?"

Edward Hobbs: First, the wrinkle? I accept it. Of course, I think that wrinkle's there. I think it's a very important feature, now that I'm clear what you're talking about. If you thought I was sanguine, I'm glad I put on a good front. But I'm not. At the very end I meant to suggest that there just may be several generations of work; maybe it's not even possible. Or it may be that it will simply come down to those fundamental kinds of incompatibilities that Claude was pointing toward. But at least we can be clear about them. And it may be that these differences may be felt so deeply, on an ideological level, that we can't have dialogue. I don't doubt that that could be often true. But I watch the way ordinary people in ordinary situations have problems in talking to each other and get into an argument about words. With students in a discussion class, one of them will phrase the thing a certain way and will fight over whether that's the word, or another word. It's not a very important thing, but people will feel affronted. Emotion gets into this heavily. What tends to happen is: someone comes forward and says, "There's a new method! We have a new issue of Semeia, called 'the Thruthellthral method of hermeneutics.'" And others write a review and say, "That's an absolutely absurd thing. We've gotten on perfectly well with the old methods." And then the Thruthellthral people will respond with anger because they've been rejected. And so on. I'm not saying there's a way of getting rid of emotion, but I suggest it would help if we were clearer about relationships, about what a given hermeneutics can do and what it might not do, and how it relates to others, and what it is that a given one will illuminate and what it won't illuminate. For example, it would help if we were clear that to do a



historical-critical job on a biblical text does not tell you which church to join or even tell you whether you ought to cheat on your income tax. It would help to be clear on that, so that we could at least be emotional about more important things.

Claude Welch: Well, I thought Steve was not talking about your being sanguine about the possibility of some kind of hierarchy or map, but rather your contentment or happiness with the pluralism. Is that what you meant?

Steven Knapp: Yes.

Claude Welch: Anyway, it's interesting. Your first fundamental proposition is the recognition of the value, even if not the validity - that's a nice distinction; I can see some point to a genuinely pluralistic hermeneutics. Now, do you mean to say a genuinely pluralistic hermeneutics? Or several pluralistic hermeneutics?

Edward Hobbs: No, no, no. A pluralist...

Claude Welch: You seem to be celebrating the value of pluralism here.

Edward Hobbs: I am, I am, yes. And sanguine I took as a term that meant hopeful rather than happy.

Steven Knapp: If we go back to the terminological distinction, your distinction between diversity and pluralism, I take it pluralism was the position that you want to take; and diversity is the fact to face.

Edward Hobbs: That's right, that's right.

Steven Knapp: So one could be either sanguine about the prospect of achieving pluralism, or sanguine about the fact of diversity. I'm not actually all that sanguine about either one of those things. And perhaps it was your tone that I took to be just a general tone of sanguinity.

Edward Hobbs: I see. Well, maybe I misused the word. I've always taken it to have something to do with hopefulness, not just cheerfulness.

Steven Knapp: Well, originally what I thought you had in mind was the prospect of achieving a kind of mutual helpfulness of these various approaches, so that the historicism and the feminism and the politicalism could sort of contribute to each other; that they wouldn't simply be ignoring each other's results but making use of them in ways that would be mutually illuminating. And it struck me that an obstacle to that might be the fact that it wasn't so much methodological disagreement as a combination of methodological and ideological disagreement, and that in my experience, at least, of literary criticism, ideological differences seem to be much more profoundly divisive than any arguments about styles of work in other terms. That may reflect a disciplinary difference; but it perhaps accounts for my more pessimistic view.

Edward Hobbs: Or it may be in my field I see much more discussion in the field of New Testament studies, far more discussion about hermeneutics in the last

20, 25 years than I see going on in literary criticism of say English texts or whatever. That is, scholars now want to talk about hermeneutics. So I'm not sure where the divisiveness is. I have some sanguinity in me about this or I wouldn't do the paper.

Wilhelm Wuellner: It was also embedded in the work of the Center from the outset that we wanted to cultivate that pluralism, and to emerge from the known existing diversity.

Edward Hobbs: Yes, yes, yes.

Wilhelm Wuellner: And I hope that, before too long, we get a dissertation or two written on the hermeneutical discussions in the Center for Hermeneutical Studies to analyze the actual discussion, showing how the diversity seems to be time and again dying or drowning in its own diversity and never even catching the vision of that sanguine pluralism we are talking about. And looking back on 20 years, you are now saying that maybe 20 years was too short a time to expect that to come about.

Edward Hobbs: I was far too sanguine 20 years ago. The fact that I wrote this paper 20 years later shows that I was too sanguine.

Lewis Mudge: I think it was Marvin Brown who asked, "What is the burning question?" And to me the burning question is what I think Richard Rorty referred to as "the conversation of the human race." I think he's written an article titled "A Philosophy in the Conversation of the Human Race." And I wonder if we couldn't simply say hermeneutical studies in the conversation of the human race? How can these studies contribute to the realization of humanity as an interpreting community? It seems to me that every hermeneutical theory is based in some conversation or in some community of interpretation. I like what Claude Welch said: it's not only a question of believing but being a member of a community of belief or ideology. It seems to me that virtually every theoretical position in hermeneutics is a refinement or bringing to the level of reflection of some kind of hermeneutical practice that is associated with some community of belief, whether religious belief or secular belief or whatever it may be. Now, just as the analytical philosophers a generation ago sought to serve the other disciplines by clarifying what proposition were about, can hermeneutical studies have such a helping role as that? It seems to me that that is the burning question. Robert Bellah puts it very well when he says that the human race is deeply and multidimensionally interdependent but that we have no agreement about what that interdependency means, and we need some approach to that question. Are you talking about anything like that?

Edward Hobbs: Oh, you smoked me out. Of course. Yes, I was trying to sound modest earlier and say not many students are really interested in this. But no, the future of the human race is what I hope this kind of discussion is helping toward.

Lewis Mudge: Or just the conversation of the human race.

Edward Hobbs: Or to help it toward a conversation.



Lewis Mudge: Yes.

Edward Hobbs: Because it's Babel right now.

Wilhelm Wuellner: The new term that Rorty used in his latest book is "solidarity" (Richard Rorty, Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, Cambridge University Press, 1989). Maybe that's what you're talking about, Edward, having in mind all three dimensions which Rorty evokes.

Wellington Wilson: To tie that in with Mary Ann's analogy of Berkeley, the burning question, the difficulty that I see is that we are rushing to an answer. We ask rhetorical questions but there are not necessarily rhetorical answers. And using the analogy that Mary Ann made about Berkeley, I would like to broaden it to the world. The world functions as it does. And it is because of a certain disposition, a certain proclivity, that caused us to carve up the functionings of the world into various aspects - it's geographical aspects, because we are focused on how a typography of the world functions; we may focus on the world from a political aspect; we may focus on the world from the standpoint of vegetation, and so forth. But the world itself does not carve itself into those categories. It is this disposition, our subjectivity. And if we approach things hermeneutically, we should be aware of this subjective point of view, this potentially biased disposition, this aspect of the mental projections. This is the proclivity that carves out that inherent hidden point of view. That is that proclivity that is going to shape how we're going to begin to interpret what we view. And if we begin to understand this, if we play around with the question, then we will begin to see the various aspects.

Now, in response to the various hermeneutics, you mentioned that sometimes they cannot interact or cannot respond to each other. That's true. But if we recognize the dispositions that these individuals have--that if they are holding to a position, if they are reifying that particular position, then they are less likely to have an interaction, and not so if they do not reify stringently, therefore they will have some looseness in which they can begin to see another point of view. But it seems that we must focus on what the question is, or focus on the disposition of that subjective aspect of it, that is the thing that really determines the way that we're going to perceive and interpret something.

Wilhelm Wuellner: Is that mental disposition anything like what the old rhetoricians called "invention", inventing an argument, inventing communication?

Thomas Leahy: What seemed to me to be particularly significant in this session was: (1) the acknowledgement of the importance of the faith-commitment of an author for the interpretation of his or her work, (2) the community basis of the author's faith-commitment, and (3) the multiplicity of communities to which the author belonged and which influenced the form of the author's faith-commitment and work.

Dan Fraikin: I thought about this pluralism. One thing is to think the pluralism, and that's a philosophical question. I mean, how can you imagine plurality? The other one is to practice it. Now, the practice of all the methodologies of the different approaches together is an impossible task, for



very practical reasons, sociopolitical reasons. One is that it is impossible to be competent in all of them at the same time: no one is. This diversity is presently splitting the community. And then you can ask, "Why does one approach suddenly predominate at one period of history?" They come in their time, and they recede in their time, too; but they don't communicate very well. Anyone who presently reads French exegetical biblical literature realizes that very little of what is going on in the United States is present to them, and vice versa. Right? Communities of interpretation are separated for geographical reasons, language reasons, and also for real community reasons. And there are social reasons. So I think, with the post-modernists, as they are called sometimes, there should be an awareness of what group or what situation a hermeneutical practice serves. It's good to serve people, and it's not just because they are opportunities; it's because of the effect of interpretation. Some effects of interpretation are good to some communities. And they are not the same. I would think that the hermeneutical function of thinking, the question of communication, to achieve a world conversation becomes a very special task. For there are hermeneutical procedures or practices, and then there's hermeneutics, which is an effort to bring all the practitioners into some sort of common understanding so that we keep the human race united.

Edward Hobbs: I would like to comment on that before we end. First, to start at the very end, I said "rationalist hermeneutics," "formalist, structuralist hermeneutics." That's a little misleading. These aren't all in fact hermeneutics; they are exegetical practices. I should have been more strict in my use of the word "hermeneutics," because I don't think "hermeneutics" ought to be applied to exegetical methods. It ought to be restricted instead to trying to define what kind of question do we seek an answer to, or what would constitute an interpretation. I say, what would constitute an interpretation, not what is the right interpretation, because that's an exegetical problem. But I especially would like to respond to your example of French biblical studies in America. I know that this is true. But I don't think it's geographical or linguistic. For example, German biblical studies and American biblical studies have for at least a century been very similar, been on the same kind of wave length. A big interchange takes place; scholars move back and forth, despite the difference of language, or difference of geography. But something else has constituted this community. It probably has to do with what universities are about, and a given understanding of how a university functions. It probably also has something to do with religion, the fact that most American biblical scholarship that was discussed by and large was Protestant until the last 30 years or so; and similarly, Germany published a lot of Protestant interpretation, while there wasn't much Protestant interpretation in France. So I suspect it was partly a Pan-Protestant deal, but partly a linkage between American universities and the German model of the university.

Wilhelm Wuellner: I think you, Dan, put your finger on something. In the last 20 years I've felt frequently that in the Center's hermeneutical discussions we needed a third party especially when it came to talking past each other and not understanding what the other one was saying; to help interpret what the other one was trying to communicate. One answer to that need may be what we have in the United Nations: the skill of simultaneous translation, to make sure that



you understand in your own language what the discussion partner was talking about, and what in the heat of the debate you couldn't understand. What we may need then is, indeed, some hermeneutēs, some Hermes capable of bringing about this relation. Edward, I appreciate the clarification that we are, indeed, not talking about method, but about theory, as in literary theory as over against literary criticism. This would define hermeneutics more as theory rather than a methodology. (See David Tracy, Plurality and Ambiguity: Religion As Test Case for Hermeneutics, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985.)

Edward Hobbs: Yes.

Dan Fraikin What would be the social milieu, the locus, of a world hermeneutical study? Where is it that human beings on the planet find a need-- I mean, if they are sociopolitical, a human situation that calls for mutual understanding, of which our texts of hermeneutics are only a particular case, where? The location?

Edward Hobbs: I think it's going to be located in one of two places: either in the threat of annihilation of the human race by ourselves; or in the science fiction threat that some creatures from outer space are going to land and offer to treat us all like cattle.

Wilhelm Wuellner: I thought you would bring up as third alternative the Westar Institute. (Westar Institute, P.O. Box 1526, Sonoma CA 95476. With its more than half a dozen research seminars, the Institute is "devoted to reducing biblical and religious illiteracy in America.") Seriously, some hermeneutical institutes have always claimed, as we did, that we are the location where the power and limits of pluralism would be experienced and tested. In visiting various and sundry hermeneutical centers and institutes in Europe, I found that they, however, were the last ones where such could or would take place.

Mary Ann Donovan: Yes. Wouldn't it be more useful to start at that whole thing by looking at what already transpires in television and in movies and in the print at that level? Places like this institute, could be analyzing the way in which that is already operating to build a world of common image, and from the common image, common values and common discourse. The commonality, the locus of a world community conversation, is, I think, more at that level than at the rarified level of our kind of discussion. But it would behoove us to understand what's happening there and to get at an analysis of how meaning is crossing language barriers and shaping cultures that really have very little in common at a deeper level.

Lewis Mudge: It would also be very useful in the attempt to bring about an ecumenical council of the Christian church. We need some kind of a critical view of our misunderstandings.

Mary Ann Donovan: Yes. The whole effort that's been going on for the last ten years in the World Council of Churches to develop an common understanding or questions at least - common questions, if not common understandings - about the meaning of the apostolic faith and so of the Apostles' Creed. That's an extraordinarily interesting endeavor, and very illustrative of the kind of problem, the kind of question, you're raising: Where might one look for an



endeavor to come to this world conversation? Where might one find it struggling to emerge? That's another place.

Lewis Mudge: In that particular conversation in the Commission on Faith and Works, there is a rather low level of hermeneutical sophistication, it seems to me.

Mary Ann Donovan: Right, right.

Marvin Brown: May I just say one word? I think pluralism has a different contribution to make to the clients. It's not for a common understanding. I think that there are basic divisions in our global society and we need to find contributions for our own section, which is the rich and the wealthy and the powerful section. And what we need, it seems to me, and what pluralism can offer, is to be able to live with differences. I mean, there are just things all over our nation going on that seem to say to me that the real problem is we cannot tolerate, we cannot live with, people who are different than we are, with ideas that are different than ours. And that's what we need to work on, some way to help our clients live with differences. And it seems to me that that's one of the contributions of pluralism. If it's with texts, or if it's with different religions, etc., it's that there are differences, and if you don't agree with me it's not because you don't understand me. You may well understand me and you still won't agree with me, right? There are just differences. And it seems that that is what we need to work on.

Edward Hobbs: May I make a comment about something that I enjoyed very much? The simultaneous translation model contributes something that isn't gotten at by my map or atlas or globe model. It's a very important one, and it's a stage I'm pleading for. I remember I was very much engaged in the language of Esperanto when I was young. I even became a member of the International Board of the Esperanto Language, an Estrarano. Esperanto doesn't go very far here, because you can go all over the U.S.A. with English. But in Europe (you can also go everywhere with English, I guess!) and in other places where languages are changed in such a short number of miles, Esperanto had some utility. One of the real arguments for Esperanto was that if we would all speak the same language, we'd all understand each other; and then, if we all understood each other, we'd all turn out to be in agreement. But then, we might find out that we understand each other and want to kill each other, or something of that sort. That happens inside the United States as such. Nevertheless, it's an important stage. We may uncover radical differences by means of it, but that's part of what I'm proposing, up to my fourth step. Nevertheless, my fourth step may be doomed.

Ernst Troeltsch was very significant in shaping my way of thinking about many things. When I showed the paper that Claude does remember to my friend Roger at Wellesley, who is also very fascinated with Troeltch and is writing on him now, he said to me, "Ah, but you see, you're quoting Troeltch here, you're arguing for that overarching civilization." He reminded me that the problem is that Troeltch did assume that that overarching civilization was going to be a Christian one, and that finally we had somehow reached it. At the very end of his life, though we don't have those last lectures, he seemed to be moving toward a possible final incompatibility. There's a sense in which I have to admit Roger's criticism and say, "Yes, I guess in a sense I have been a



Troeltschian, and I have this illusion, or this faith, that somehow it all makes sense: there ultimately is a single codex which we are trying to interpret. Our beloved codex is human existence, human history. And it can be interpreted in some universal sense." And I suppose my own position on that now would have to be, "I hope that's true, and I want to work toward it coming about. But if it isn't possible, at least we'll be clear what the issues are." That, I think, is where I just have to come down. Thank you!

Julian Boyd: Shall we thank Edward again?

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